

Transcription Date: 09/16/09 – Transcriber: JJ

[BEGIN AUDIO]

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** The time was 10:30 in the morning. The subject is Mr. Fields. The interviewer is Mr. Daniel Martinez, Historian for the National Park Service. The Oral History project is a cooperative effort of the United States Navy, [SOUNDS LIKE] ComNav Base, Pearl Harbor, Barber's Point naval air station, State of Hawaii Historic Preservation Division and the National Parks Service. Could you please state your full name for me?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Jarome G. Fields.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Age, Sir?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Seventy.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Your present address?

**JAROME FIELDS:** 3202 John [PH] Ell Avenue, Kingman, Arizona.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Where were you born?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Phillips, Wisconsin.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** On what date?

**JAROME FIELDS:** September 28<sup>th</sup> 1922.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Where did you grow up, Mr. Fields?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Up until high school at Phillips Wisconsin, and 18 miles away at Park Falls, Wisconsin.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** How many were in your family?

**JAROME FIELDS:** A brother, myself and parents...mother, father.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Did your brother serve in World War II as well?

**JAROME FIELDS:** No, he was too young.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** When did you enlist?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Oh, October 25<sup>th</sup>, 1940.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Why did you enlist?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well, a lot of my friends had enlisted earlier. They were older than me. Over at Southridge Field in a pursuit squadron. Pursuit group. And so I went over to visit them and went out on maneuvers with them and was gonna enlist at Southridge Field when I became 18. But I went to the recruiting office and they had a vacancy for Hawaii.

And so I said, “I think I will take it.” Winter was coming on and it looked very attractive. So I enlisted for Kauai Air Corps.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Why did you chose the air corps?

**JAROME FIELDS:** I’m pretty well hooked on airplanes, especially after visiting over at Southridge Field and I had the bug.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Do you remember when you saw your first airplane?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Oh, I think it was in 1927 or so. We had some, I believe it was army air corps biplanes that was flying around and made a force landing up there in my home...hay field. And we all of course went out to see that, it wasn’t very far away! [LAUGHS]

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Did you build model airplanes?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Little bit.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** So you had a fascination early on?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Oh yeah!

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Where was your training conducted?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well, they gathered us up at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri outside of Saint Louis until we got a trainload of people and subsequently a boatload of people put us on a troop train, took us out to...Angel Island in San Francisco Bay, stayed there for a couple days, and....

Loaded us on a troop ship over for Hawaii. And all of us was destined to go either to Wheeler’s Field, the pursuit group, or to Hickam at the bomb group.

That took care of everybody, all the recruits.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** What did your training consist of?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well I took some elementary training at Jefferson Barracks but basically it was done at to Hickam Field. Little bit of marching, hygiene, gunnery, learning guns and general discipline things.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Did you ever have parachute training?

**JAROME FIELDS:** No.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** So you never had an opportunity to jump out of an airplane or even know how those work, until you got to Hickam.

**JAROME FIELDS:** No. No.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Your gunnery training, how extensive was that, and how was it done?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well, we used to go over to [PH] Ballast Field. We would go over there for two weeks. Each squadron went over. And you had small arms fire and we had aerial gunnery training with our B18s.

And they would tow a sock and we would fly along and shoot at it, and that was the extent of the aerial gunnery training! [LAUGHS]

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** So, it really wasn't all that extensive?

**JAROME FIELDS:** No. No.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** When you arrive at Hickam Field, where and who are you assigned to?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Actually, I was assigned right from the boat at, in Honolulu harbor. Most of the commanders [LAUGHS] would come out on the ship and make a pre-canvas of everybody, because they were looking for ball players.

And [LAUGHS] they would follow, they would sneak his name into his roster to come to his squadron. And that included every squadron commander.

And so I got my name on the 26th squadron.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Were you a ballplayer?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Oh yeah. In high school I played in semi pro baseball. In fact that's where I made my money.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Is that right? What position?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Oh, second base.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** So your athletic skills got you in the squadron, not your gunnery skills.

**JAROME FIELDS:** Oh yeah, I had no gunnery skills other than deer hunting with my dad! [LAUGHS]

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** What training took place from that point on?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Oh, we had a...mechanical school, aircraft mechanics school at Hickam. It was a branch of [PH] Chanute Field. And they had everything. They had at of [PH] Chanute, and the of [PH] Chanute instructors. And they taught there at Hickam. And we took our training then. And the people from [SOUNDS LIKE] Leader Field also came down for that training. Because we had no technical training before we got here at all.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** When you say no technical training, what do you mean exactly?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well, either aircraft maintenance or armament.... We had to get it here at Hawaii. We were strictly raw material. Just a warehouse to get us over here is all.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** What did you think of Hickam Field when you saw it?

**JAROME FIELDS:** I loved it! Great. Beautiful. Brand new.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Where was your barracks located?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Right on the west end of the big barracks. Right near the fire station.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** I see. What kind of aircraft were you flying at the time for your training?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well, we had B18s in our squadron and I think we had four B17D's that we got in September of 1941. But I was not assigned to the B17s. I was on the B18s.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Let's take you up to the morning of December 7, 1941. Where were you that day?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well, I'd gotten up and went down to breakfast, ate breakfast, got a paper out of a stand, and returned to my squadron area and laid down on the bunk and proceeded to read the funny papers. [LAUGHS]

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Now this was at Hickam field?

**JAROME FIELDS:** This was at Hickam.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** What happened next?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well, pretty soon I started, and it was always fun to watch. The navy used to do practice raids, some weren't too bad. They always put on a great show, and we thought it was similar.

Every time a carrier group would come into Pearl, they'd put on a show. A mock attack. And we thought this was the same. But we went to watch it and pretty soon there was a lot of black smoke, and pretty soon some shooting. We knew it was a little bit different than what we had been observing.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** When did you finally realize this was not a mock raid?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Just about the time a Jap plane went by [LAUGHS]....at practically our window height in the barracks, and we seen his insignia. And he was shooting.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** What level of the barracks were you on?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Second floor.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** He flew by at the same height?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Essentially. Don't hold me to it because the palm trees and so forth. [LAUGHS] Might have been a few feet higher than that.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** What went through your mind at that point?

**JAROME FIELDS:** "It would probably be wise to see what's going on and perhaps take shelter."

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Was there any idea of getting to an aircraft you were assigned to?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Yes. And we all tried to go that way and 'bout time we would make a break on that open street down towards our hangar line, they would...as they would drop their bombs, they then would make a pass around and start strafing as well as bombing the hangar area and the tarmac.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** As an aviator, how would you rate the Japanese pilots' skill?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well, of what I seen I thought they did quite well! [LAUGHS] Excellent.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Were you scared?

**JAROME FIELDS:** I don't think so. I was quite fearful that if I made a mistake I could easily become a casualty.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Were you mad?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Probably discouraged. I don't think I was mad. Probably just discouraged we got outfoxed! [LAUGHS]

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** How long did the attack go on at Hickam?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well, I think probably for about 45 minutes, that first initial attack. By that time I... we had worked our way behind trees and stuff over to the [SOUNDS LIKE] ball diamond.

And I was in the dugout then! [LAUGHS] And then things quieted down, and I seen a good spot out in the open. Out in right field. They had some bushes out there, over near the Hawaiian air depot, the big hangar at Hickam. So we thought we'd go out there, allow more people to crowd around. Everything in the line was destroyed at that time. There was no hope really for trying to get any planes in the air.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Most of the planes were burning?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Oh yeah. And they were pretty well gone. Didn't have no pilots anyway to fly 'em even if we could get 'em off. And so we went out in right field area and we thought we were pretty safe out there. And then a group of level bombers come along, and dropped their bombs, and we watched them drop, and...."Oh my stars they're comin' right at us!"

And they [SOUNDS LIKE] bracketed us with their big level bombs.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** You mean they landed on the ball field?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well, it was out in right field in the rough area. Beyond the [SOUNDS LIKE] bombery ball field. And when they went into the ground, they were designed to penetrate the.... I understand that the Japanese thought that was a fuel storage area from previous plans that had been drawn.

And subsequently they made changes in the fuel farm tanks were not there but they didn't know it. And that was a deliberate target.

And as a result "them" bombs were pretty big bombs, and when they bracketed us, we got thrown up in the air and then [LAUGHS] you come down pretty hard.

And then the rocks and the coral starts coming down on you. I got injured pretty bad, a big piece of rock come down on my shoulder.

But after a while, after everything simmered down, guys took me over to the hospital, there were so many dying and dead people there, [LAUGHS] I felt embarrassed. We all left, and went to work.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Did it finally strike you how serious this all was, seeing that?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Yes because we as most people thought they were gonna be coming in to invade. And as such, that was paramount. So we had to get weapons and try to defend “ourself” in an organized way.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Even though you were wounded, how?

**JAROME FIELDS:** I really wasn’t wounded. It was just a big rock went up and came down. It was sort of a...felt like it was cracked. But I was not immobile by any means. Just hurt.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** What was the final extent of that injury?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Never did go back, Jack!

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Does it bother you still?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Yeah.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Big bruises?

**JAROME FIELDS:** No. Not anymore. Hadn’t any trouble after two weeks. The pain went away.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Any idea how high you were thrown in the air? Did anybody tell you? [LAUGHS]

**JAROME FIELDS:** [LAUGHS] Well, we all got thrown into the air. But the bombs penetrated pretty deep. And when they went down and “explode,” they “come” out in a cone, so we were beyond the glass impact area. But I suspect we must have grazed off the ground five feet judging by how hard we [LAUGHS] went down! But I have no way of knowing.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Was there anybody killed or injured in the group?

**JAROME FIELDS:** [OVERLAPPING] Not in our group, no. And the reason for it was because of the depth of the bomb in...before they exploded. They were set deep.



**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Was there anything else that happened after that you'd like to recall?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Not really.... We had no food that day! [LAUGHS] And we slept out in a mongrel swamp between Hickam and the international airport, you know, Rogers Field. We were out there all night in the swamp with mosquitoes.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Did you have any idea what had happened at Pearl Harbor? Any indication?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Oh yes. We “seen” all the smoke and the rumors start passin’ by how things were destroyed there as well as our own line area. We finally did get an airplane prepared to fly that afternoon. But....

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** But you weren't on it?

**JAROME FIELDS:** No! [LAUGHS] In fact, we didn't even have a pilot for it. One of our sergeants took off and he forgot to lock the tail wheel. And he ground looped it, and then a propeller. [LAUGHS] And we got nothing flying in our squadron other than that one airplane.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** What was the morale like that night?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well, pretty low I would say.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** What'd you guys talk about, anything in particular?

**JAROME FIELDS:** No. We were just... We were constantly alert because like I said we were expecting an invasion. And there was no Communications at all to tell us yes or no, no organization at all.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** After Pearl Harbor, in the following weeks, what were you doing?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well, we were at Pearl Harbor for a few...I mean Hickam for a few days and then we moved our squadron up to Wheeler. We dispersed the bombers from Hickam, put some over at [SOUNDS LIKE] Bellows and we went up to Wheeler

Field and we just moved in up there and took over a hangar and a squadron area and conducted our operations from there.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Was your airplane destroyed or damaged on December 7<sup>th</sup>?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Damaged, yes. Yeah it got pretty well shot up.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Were you assigned a new aircraft up at Wheeler?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well, remember now, before the war I wasn't on flight, I was an aircraft mechanic.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Right.

**JAROME FIELDS:** And then when we went up to Wheeler we got B17E's and I got assigned as a tail gunner of that one. On a crew. And that was my first permanent flying.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** When were you assigned to Midway?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well, we flew out of Wheeler then constantly from, say, December 15<sup>th</sup> roughly until we "come" over to Midway and....

I don't really recall....we got briefs that we were gonna be gone, take a little bit with ya, so I brought....it said we were gonna leave at midnight or shortly thereafter. They briefed us at 6:00 at night, they wanted to keep it quite secret. We snuck out of there between midnight and two in the morning from Wheeler.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Do you remember the date of that flight?

**JAROME FIELDS:** I can't recall. I was looking at the letter that I had gotten from one of our flight commanders, and he said that May 31<sup>st</sup> he got it from his log. I can't recall what day we "come." I know I was not on the ground when the bombing took place. So we either got here after it or we were flying when it happened.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Okay.

**JAROME FIELDS:** ...and....

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Let's back track to that flight. How many airplanes flew with you to Midway?

**JAROME FIELDS:** I believe in our flight I think there was six airplanes.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** You joined some aircrafts already stationed here?

**JAROME FIELDS:** And then, some coming a little bit after.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** What was your visual impression of Midway when you saw this place?

**JAROME FIELDS:** First off we were very happy to hit it! [LAUGHS] I was quite impressed. It looked pretty from the air of course. And then we landed and we had a lot of work to do. We had to get fuel, and get our bomb load straightened out, what kind of a target we were gonna hit.

That always "run" into a lotta work. And then we had no food, so getting food was difficult and time consuming.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Now at this time, you were a rear gunner on the B17?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Tail gunner. Yeah.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Tail gunner. Can you describe the events that lead up to the Battle of Midway for your air group?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well, we...I don't recall any direct battles. It seemed like the letter that I got from the flight commander on the briefings he got, it seemed like the navy wanted to keep us a little bit away from the action the way the plans were set up.

Number one, I imagine they didn't want to expose our knowledge of "we" knowing they were there first. And second, they probably had a battle plan that they just didn't want us to goof things up. So we "was" out doing a lot of search missions. Looking for other Japanese portions of...or possible portions of a fleet.

And then I believe we no doubt would be held in reserve in case everything else failed, we still had “us” to rely on.

Which, as it turned out, judging by the way the battle as I have now subsequently read it, things were looking bad because of our initial strikes on the Jap fleet didn’t turn out too “successful.”

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Were you part of that initial strike?

**JAROME FIELDS:** No. That was strictly the navy. The torpedo bombers.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** But there was a flight of B17s that went out and attacked the transports. Were you part of that?

**JAROME FIELDS:** I think so, yes. We dropped a few bombs.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** What was that like?

**JAROME FIELDS:** [LAUGHS] Well, the bombardier had the action, mostly, we didn’t know much about it. There was no hostile action against us, so....

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Could you see the ships below from where you were?

**JAROME FIELDS:** I believe it was the flight ahead of us that dropped the bombs. And....

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Did you see any of that?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Not much. Because we were up a couple of miles. 10,000 “foot” up.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Yeah. Could you see the wakes of the ships?

**JAROME FIELDS:** A little bit yeah.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Didn’t hit any of them, apparently?

**JAROME FIELDS:** I don’t think so.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Did you have any aerial combat in Midway, did you get a chance to use your .50 caliber?

**JAROME FIELDS:** No. One day we went out, we thought we were in the middle of combat! [LAUGHS]

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** How's that?

**JAROME FIELDS:** We thought we were bombing a Japanese cruiser and what it was, was an American submarine that was out of position. So we made a pass over it, and we saw....people shooting at us, we thought, with "them" lights blinking. They were trying to signal us "to not bomb them," and we thought it was gunfire coming up, so we wheeled around and dropped our bombs on 'em.

Turned out to be an American submarine. And when they seen the bombs coming down, they crash dived. So when the bombs went off, they were crash diving, we thought we set a record of fastest destruction of a cruiser. 15 seconds. [LAUGHS]

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** [LAUGHS]

**JAROME FIELDS:** Man, we were very, very happy. And we got back, and as we were landing and taxing in, the word came down that we bombed an American submarine and that really deflated us. And we were very sheepish, to say the least. And the navy people were very made at us. [LAUGHS] In fact, they were quite hostile! And that went on, even for years.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** What kind of interaction did you have with the...we'll wait.

**JAROME FIELDS:** Take your time.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Yeah. Mr. Fields, what kind of interaction did you have with the marines over on Eastern Island? Any card games, conversations? Or were you separate from them?

**JAROME FIELDS:** We "was" busy, really, night and day. We would be flying during daytime and even during nighttime. And then we had to refuel our plane by hand pump. And you put 1700 gallons of fuel in, pumping it by hand, that takes many barrels....50 gallon barrels to put in. So we kept busy.

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Between loading bombs and working on our airplane and trying to find some foods, we.... No time for...we were not bored. [LAUGHS] I had to smile when you said “interaction.” About the only thing I can recall is after about a week, my coveralls started getting just a little bit stained, dirty, and messy.

And I thought that I needed some clothes. And a marine had washed his trousers, his uniform, and had them hanging on a bush to dry. And I snuck up and stole a pair of his pants. And I cut off the legs and made some shorts. I found a rope and made a belt. And that’s all I had to wear.

And that was my interaction with the marines, I stole his pants. [LAUGHS]

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** So that was your combat uniform, right? [LAUGHS]

**JAROME FIELDS:** Yeah! [LAUGHS] I wore that for another two weeks ‘till I got back to Hawaii. That’s all I had.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Would it be also safe to say that during this time you were putting in long hours and there wasn’t much time for enjoyment?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Yeah.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** No baseball games?

**JAROME FIELDS:** No. No, no.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** How tired were you?

**JAROME FIELDS:** I don’t know. We were tough as nails. I don’t recall complaining about being tired. [LAUGHS] Between looking for food, working on our airplane and every now and then we’d play a bit with the birds....

See, we were sleeping underneath the wing of the airplane and they were all around us and they got to know us quite well. So we’d play a little bit with them. And that was the extent of it.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** I heard a story about a certain gooney bird that used to do a “flight inspection” on your plane. Can you tell that story?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Oh yes! Every morning he would walk exactly three times around the airplane and then come back and look us “right,” and then go over in a nest. [LAUGHS] We should have hired him! [LAUGHS]

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** When did you leave Midway?

**JAROME FIELDS:** I don’t quite recall. It seemed like it was... we were here about 20, 21 days if I recall. So it must have been about the 20<sup>th</sup> I imagine. 21<sup>st</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>. I don’t really know.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** When did you find out the Battle of Midway had been won by the United States?

**JAROME FIELDS:** I would say... about on June 6<sup>th</sup>. “It was pretty well convinced” that we had done more damage than they’d done. And they were on their way back, repelled, and I guess at that point we thought we won.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Did you realize the significance of what you’d accomplished out here?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Not at the moment, no.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** When did you?

**JAROME FIELDS:** I think when we started getting feedback from after the news reached the States. And then they brought “out” how significant the battle was and how it seemed like the Japanese would not turn to the east any further. And would forget about any expansionist plans this way.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Were you very proud of what you’d accomplished here?

**JAROME FIELDS:** At the moment, we didn’t quite realize it, but [LAUGHS] as months and years went on I became more proud of.... That was the turning point. I don’t think we quite realized it at the time, though.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** All right, we’re gonna stop here. And then summarize your career, and close it up.

**JAROME FIELDS:** Okay. All done, Mitch.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Mr. Fields?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Yes.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** You have commented when you arrived here you had some problems getting food, and setting up housekeeping here. Did the marines help you in that area?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Oh, no. Everybody was looking for food. See, the mess hall had gotten blown up. And there was no food. We finally got a little coffee to us in the morning. And then about 10:00 they'd give us some boiled beans. And that was our food. One meal a day.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** So there wasn't a welcome mat thrown out for you boys!

**JAROME FIELDS:** Oh, no, no! No! [LAUGHS] Except, any help was gladly accepted. But as far as...no, there was no official greetings for us. Grab a gun and pitch in.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** How did you cook your food?

**JAROME FIELDS:** We didn't. We were so busy working and like I said, we would take turns going up and getting some coffee, then come back and let somebody else go. And then at 10:00 we had some beans available and that was our food for the day. And no other facilities.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** What was the rest of your...can you highlight it for me?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well, after I left here, went back, and as I landed at Wheeler, I was greeted at the door of the plane, and they said "Get cleaned up and get up to base headquarters for an interview," and so I went up there and was to be interviewed to go back to the States for flying school. So I went up there, and....pretty much of a mess.



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My haircut wasn't very good because over here, we cut each other's hair with a pair of dikes. We had no scissors. And our hair was all chopped up and looked pretty messy.

But apparently I got by the interview all right! [LAUGHS] SO then, we were moving the Group down to Guadalcanal and they pulled us out and sent us over to [SOUNDS LIKE] Bellows to prepare us to come back to the States.

And we came back to the States and I went down, washed out of flying school eventually. Ended up going down to Hobbes, New Mexico, which was a transition school for teaching pilots to fly B17s. And my squadron commander here at Wheeler Field in Hawaii, he was the deputy base commander.

So I went down there and was in charge of a squadron for maintenance and flying four hours a day, teaching pilots. And after a while, I got a little bit sick of that, and went to put in for Rapid City, South Dakota and formed a new bomb group. And we went to England.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** What year did you go to England?

**JAROME FIELDS:** 1944.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Hold on a second. I think she's gonna put some powder on.

**JAROME FIELDS:** That's all right. Yeah, fine.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** What year Mr. Fields?

**JAROME FIELDS:** I went over there in April 1944.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** What bomb group did you join then?

**JAROME FIELDS:** We formed the 398<sup>th</sup> of Rapid City, South Dakota.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** You were shot down in the Invasion of Normandy?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well, not...a few days after that.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Okay.

**JAROME FIELDS:** The British were pretty well hemmed in and stopped. Patton had broke out and had...going towards Paris. So we were trying to help the British out. So we were bombing the front lines and coming in very low.

And the German artillery Flak was very accurate. And it blew off one of our wings. And we start snap-rolling in formation and then we dove, and then the airplane exploded.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Where were you in the airplane? What position?

**JAROME FIELDS:** I was in the top turret.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Okay.

**JAROME FIELDS:** So when the airplane exploded, it turned into confetti actually. I suspect it was the bombs that exploded. They were flying freely around the bomb bay. Because our emergency action plan always is to get rid of our bombs. You know when you are diving straight down, the bombs have nowhere to go, off its normal channel, which is through the doors.

So they probably got armed with their little propellers, and I suspect they blew up. They were 260 pound anti-personnel bombs. They weren't the high explosive. But nevertheless our airplane turned into confetti.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Did you think that was it?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well, I was knocked unconscious. And everybody else got killed. And I just barely got my chute open before I hit the ground. I "seen" the ground coming up, and I didn't have my parachute completely on but I still pulled it. And I made one swing, and then through an apple tree.

And I landed right in the middle of the [LAUGHS] German troops that were dug in! So after things quieted down, all the artillery and bombs quit dropping, they got out of their foxholes and captured me. [LAUGHS]

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Were you injured?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Yes.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** How badly?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Like I said, I had a bad concussion. I had Flak wounds. I got hit on the foot. Flak. And in the back and butt, and....A few places.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** How did the Germans treat you?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Very nice. Very nice. After I recovered, after a couple hours of laying there, they offered me some food and I was in no shape to eat. You know. The nervousness. Scared.

He asked me if I would like to bury my comrades.

And I said, yes. Of course I couldn't walk! [LAUGH] I was numb from the waist down, and he half carried me with his gun and a shovel.

And he asked for help where they found some other of my bodies of crew members, and I couldn't even put a shovel in the ground. And of course the battle was moving this way towards them and they were in no mood to spend any time to go through a more official ceremony.

And so they took us out of there and took us back a few miles and gave us some interrogation. And then I spent about the next 2, 3 weeks dodging our fighter planes. 'Cause every time they'd try to get me out, they'd shoot us off the truck.

And we finally got near into to Paris once, then all the way back to the coast. And then they walked us up through Belgium and Holland and then to the east towards Germany.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** How long were you a prisoner of war?

**JAROME FIELDS:** About 10 months.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** How did you get out of being a prisoner of war?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well, after I got to Germany, they put me on a train and sent me over to Poland to a prisoner of war camp. And after what I'd been through, I thought

I was at the Hilton hotel it was so luxurious. Everyone else thought it was bad, but I thought it was great! There was food and beds, and.... We were there, I think four or five months. And no problems! Then the Russians “come” and we had to evacuate the camp and the winter.... A very cold winter. It was February 7<sup>th</sup>. The coldest winter in a hundred years in northern Europe. So off we leave the camp and start heading out and sleeping outside.

Sleeping in the snow drifts, and that went on for 88 days. We walked for about 20 miles a day. Our food lasted, oh probably about two weeks.

We had one Red Cross parcel, and then we had to scrounge a little bit and we would get one boiled potato a day and that would be about it. And sometimes we could barter for a little bread from the little towns we went through. But it was very difficult.

Pretty soon with no food, no water, everyone started getting sick. So by May 2<sup>nd</sup>, which we ended up after walking 600 miles in 88 days [LAUGHS], we ended up over by the Danish border. And a British spearhead liberated us.

They also captured some Germans and me and a Polish fighter pilot, we took some bicycles away from the German officers and started heading back to the Channel. And we kept riding, and got to the [PH] Landsdorf area I believe.

And got hooked up with a combat engineer outfit, American. And I stayed with them for a couple days and they got me fed, and cleaned up a bit. And they put me in an automobile. Some guys were taking a pass back to Brussels and I went back with them.

Got to a British medical doctor and he helped me quite a bit with my dysentery.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** You were suffering from dysentery and illness?

**JAROME FIELDS:** [OVERLAPPING] Very bad.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Would you be there at VE Day?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Yeah. I was in Brussels. I'd just got to Brussels on VE Day, sicker than a dog. And that British doctor fixed me up very "good." And got me down to Camp Lucky Strike, doing great!

And waiting for a boat, and I went to a mess hall and "come" back after eating the evening meal, and I woke up three days later in a hospital. I don't know what happened, how I got there, I had no identification. They didn't know either.

When I woke up, they said, "Anything the matter?" Tried to get some medical history from me. I told them about getting a bad concussion when I got shot down so they whizzed me in for X-Rays [LAUGHS] to see if I had any brain damage.

And everything "come" out negative there, and so then they reduced it down to just, I was so weakened from lack of food.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Is that where your war ended?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Yeah.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Where were you on VJ Day?

**JAROME FIELDS:** I was in the hospital at that point in [PH] Lahore, France. I was there I think a month. I'm not sure. And I finally ended up getting on a boat coming back. And then, went on 60 day recuperation leave.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** What did VJ Day mean to you?

**JAROME FIELDS:** I was very relieved! [LAUGHS]

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Did you have a chance to celebrate, or were you too ill to do that?

**JAROME FIELDS:** I never did do any drinking. I was way up in northern Wisconsin and things.... We took it rather gracefully up there.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Some people have remarked that Midway was a crossroads in their life. Was it for you?

**JAROME FIELDS:** No, I don't think so. Looking back at it now, it was quite an adventure. But I would have to think that later on probably was the most important part of my life.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** So in retrospect, it was, but not at the time?

**JAROME FIELDS:** [OVERLAPPING] I think it was just one great adventure here but nothing that I would say my life focuses around.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** What do you think you got out of your experience of World War II?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well....

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Did it prepare you for other things?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Yes. Yes.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** In what way?

**JAROME FIELDS:** I don't know. I have thought back and I think I got more out of being a prisoner of war than they took from me. I think it made me realize...being more considerate of others, more appreciative of everything around me. I enjoy everything.

I think it was really good, looking back at it. I think I got a lot out of it, in spite of the suffering.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Did World War II...change your character as a person?

**JAROME FIELDS:** [LAUGHS] A little humor comes in there, I think I'm still a character, but yes I would have to say so. After that, I started taking things a little bit more "serious." Of course I'd gotten married and had more responsibilities. I went on ROTC duty and was teaching at Kansas State University.

And things just [INDISCERNIBLE].

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Why did you come back to Midway?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Oh, well, [LAUGHS] from right off, I guess I couldn't say no when Mike called! But, no. I had some pleasant thoughts of my whole early years over in the Pacific, here. And so I thought, well, why not?

And also, I was in contact with the bombardier on our crew, which by the way, he just died here on September 6<sup>th</sup>. And anyway....

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Was he gonna come back?

**JAROME FIELDS:** No.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Ah, ha.

**JAROME FIELDS:** He was a doctor in Palm Springs, and his health was not too good.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Are you surprised at what you see here?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well, yes. The trees. There “was” no trees that I recall because I was over here on Sand Island just briefly for, I would say 10, 15 minutes. And we were so hungry that one day we were havin’ a break, I said, “I’ll go up to the PX and see if we can find some food.”

Candy bars and so forth. I caught the ferry boat over. And just as I was in the middle of the channel out there, I heard the airplanes fire up and thought, ‘Oh I’m missing my flight!’ So as soon as we landed, I “run” up to the PX, running over birds, the birds were so thick here.

Couldn't find a place to put my feet. “Run” in, got some candy bars. “Run” back to the boat, went right back to the airplane.

And that, as you know, as fast as I was running, I did not observe much.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Are you anxious to see Eastern Island?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Not really. I think that sand dune that we parked our plane in and slept in has changed. I probably couldn't find it, wouldn't know it if I “seen” it.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Curious?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Ah, passing. [LAUGHS] I lived on the sand dunes in California. They don't have that much enticement for me.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** What's Midway mean to you as an American?

**JAROME FIELDS:** I think going back to the days that we were more of a power in the Pacific, from the Spanish American war on, that....

I think...it should be that we should have some influence over this whole area and Midway should play a part it. And I don't think we should give it up.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** When you think of the Battle of Midway, what does it mean to you?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Well, after subsequent stories and learning more about it, I see the significance of how it did turn the tide. But at the time it was just another day's work...Didn't have "no" meaning to us.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Well, I think that's it for me.

**SECOND MODERATOR:** Jerry you told me a story about catching fish. Can you tell that to Dan, please?

**JAROME FIELDS:** Oh, yeah! Well, as you know, we were getting awful hungry here. And so we figured out that we'd leave one guy when we went out on a mission to try to catch some fish.

And we got a piece of a wrecked airplane.

So while we were flying, we didn't expect much in the way of aerial combat. So we left somebody here to fish. And if he caught something we had a piece of aluminum to cook it on. We would drain some fuel out of the airplane, out of the sump, let it run on the ground in the sand, and then we'd just light it, and we'd have some [SOUNDS LIKE] a place to cook up.

We'd put our aluminum there and put the fish on it. And we ate a little bit of that. Everyday we didn't catch fish, but a few days we did! [LAUGHS]



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And then of course, we had, for beverages, to have a good meal you have to have a good diet. We would go around and find beer around the island that got...

When the PX got blown up. And we would put the beer in the airplane and cool it on our flights, and have beer with our fish.

And if we wanted to smoke, we'd find a cigar in the sand. We were quite self-sufficient here! [LAUGHS] Of course, we had "them" beans from the navy, remember.

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** That's right. Sounds like a well-balanced diet.

**JAROME FIELDS:** Oh, yes. [LAUGHS]

**DANIEL MARTINEZ:** Well thank you, Jerry. I really appreciate it.

**JAROME FIELDS:** Thank you.

[END AUDIO]